Robbing Peter to Pay Paul: The Differential Effect of GSS Restrictiveness on Process Satisfaction and Group Cohesion

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Abstract That Group Support Systems (GSS) can enhance group performance has been revealed by several studies. Studies have also demonstrated a favorable influence on process satisfaction. However, GSS research has drawn heavily from a perspective that may limit the full range of phenomena at play in group meetings. In addition to the micro-level interaction that occurs in GSS-supported group meetings, group participants are also likely influenced by other groups and macro-level institutions outside any given small group meeting. We focus on two processes in particular. Group performance perceptions such as process satisfaction appear to be driven by reproduction of institutionally relevant procedures while group interaction perceptions such as cohesion are driven by micro-level group interaction. This study more fully considers the impact on group interaction variables by varying levels of GSS restrictiveness (i.e., facilitation and process structuring) and assessing the effect that these may have on perceptions of group cohesion and process satisfaction. We develop and test a causal path model, finding that groups in the more restrictive treatment perceived that they made more appropriate use of the GSS, leading to higher process satisfaction than did those in the less restrictive treatment. However, these groups are also characterized by reduced group interaction, and also expressed lower perceived cohesion than did those in the non-restrictive treatment. Theoretical discussions of why this may have occurred are offered.

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